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Profile

Emily Harris speaks about feminism & the guerrilla front

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Emily Harris says she has worked as a revolutionary in the underground guerrilla front "because I see armed propaganda as an essential complement to mass organizing."

Articulating her guerrilla and feminist politics, Harris made the statement in a 1,214-word letter addressed to "Sisters and Brothers," printed in the November/December edition of *The Lesbian Tide*. Harris's attorney, Leonard Weinglass, confirmed the statement was written by his client on Oct. 27 and released to the lesbian feminist publication and other "selected media" in Los Angeles and "up north."

In the letter, which appears to be a partial explanation of her politics as well as an outreach for feedback from other activists, Harris maintains the "Hearst kidnaping" and subsequent distribution of food to thousands of poor people was an example of how the guerrilla front "heightens contradictions" in our society.

Further, explains Harris, guerrilla warfare "heightens the tactical level of struggle whenever it becomes clear in our communities that peaceful methods will not meet our needs." Calling armed struggle "the means by which we insure our victory over U.S. imperialism," the long range goal of the guerrilla movement is "to build the well-trained nucleus of the people's army."

Claiming there can be no peace until the overthrow of imperialism brings freedom, Harris urges women not to delay in "developing and supporting the guerrilla front." Unless women assume leadership on this as well as other levels of struggle, Harris writes, they will always be "caught unprepared." The author cites Marilyn Buck, Susan Saxe, Assata Shakur, Lolita Lebron and Safiya Bukhari as "strong sisters" who "accept nothing short of their own freedom and self-determination."

'Revolutionary Feminism'

The thrust of Harris's letter speaks to her own experience as "a revolutionary woman," and, indeed, indications are that the Sept. 18 arrest of Patty, Bill and Emily interrupted the SLA in the middle of a study and exposition of a new politic they call "revolutionary feminism."

Previous to the arrests, sexism was referred to in several early SLA communiques, but there was little other reference to women per se. Yet in the last six weeks, Patty Hearst referred to herself as a "revolutionary feminist" speaking to a friend while in jail; the *Christian Science Monitor* (Oct. 24) quoted a "revolutionary feminist" document they received from SLA women still at large; and Emily Harris, in both of her statements and several court appearances, strongly addressed the oppression due to gender and the political posture of radical women.

"Revolutionary feminism" appears to be an integration of socialist and feminist thought. Specifically, recent comments by Emily Harris and the document referred to speak of women's oppression under imperialism and place it in a more or less traditional leftist, class analysis.

In her letter, Harris writes, "Sexism is rooted in the very foundation of U.S. imperialism." The SLA women's document proclaims: "The liberation of women and revolution are inextricably entwined. . . fighting for a revolution with a gun in hand

is not just a man's game." The communique warns that male domination in revolutionary movements but says women revolutionaries should "never take a completely separatist stand." The paper calls upon women to help men recognize their mistakes and weaknesses.

Although the document also asserts that "armed propaganda is our main focus now," the communique which accompanied its delivery explained that the authors want to fight the "pigmedia's" image of revolutionary women as "empty-headed gun-caressing automatons."

Separatism

The paper closely echoes Emily Harris's present terminology and politics. (The document, which is a preliminary to a much longer work on the same subject, was written before the Sept. 18 capture and is signed by "sisters of the Symbionese Liberation Army." Presumably, Emily Harr/ewas one of its authors.)

In her first communique, jointly written with Bill, Emily sends "love and rage to all sisters," and in her letter, she urges women to "provide leadership on all levels of struggle — legal and clandestine, armed and unarmed, peaceful and violent. . . ."

To a source quoted in *The Lesbian Tide*, Harris also wrote of disaffirming separatism. "Please don't represent my case as being separate from Bill's or his from mine. I am a revolutionary/feminist/guerrila (this is not one definition of myself but rather a series of beautiful intertwining identities); and to me my politics are inseparable from my identity as a woman."

Actually, "revolutionary feminism" is not a new concept. As the SLA women's document points out, this politic has its origins in the pre-Civil War abolitionist movement and the first wave of feminism (1848-1920). In these two movements, thousands of radical, communist and socialist women fought against slavery and argued that revolution was necessary to bring women out of their exploited status in America. The philosophy that women play a crucial role in bringing about revolution is articulated by radical feminists, and particularly by socialist feminists today.

What appears to be new is that, somewhere between the kidnaping and shoot-out activity of the spring of 1974 and their recent capture, the women of the SLA have delved into and begun emphasizing the thought of these foremothers. Whether this expansion of their politics is due to the support they presumably received from radical women while underground, or a natural evolution and time to think about who they were and where they were going politically, or both, is a matter of speculation. It becomes more clear weekly, however, that both captured and sought-after SLA women are bringing themselves into closer alignment with more traditional leftist and feminist politics.

Split Over Violence?

The similarity of thought from Harris and SLA women still at large does leave unanswered the question of the reputed political split of Patty and Wendy from the Harrises. Reportedly, Hearst and Yoshimura questioned the validity of violent tactics (bank robbery, etc.); however, there is no further mention of such a disagreement in any of the Harrises' statements, nor in the "revolutionary feminist" document.

Also somewhat curious is the fact that neither the joint Harris communique (Sept. 28) nor Emily Harris's letter mentions the SLA by name. While this omission could be prompted by their lawyers' advice, it could also indicate that the Harrises might be trying to put some distance and difference between their present politics and the relatively negative political image of their group in its early, more rhetorical days.

Also missing from Harris communications is any reference to their upcoming trial. While this is obviously a delicate area, Emily Harris appears to be more concerned at this time with putting out her politics and articulating solidarity with "the thousands of angry sisters like me who *refuse* to lead poor butchered half-lives." Denying the uniqueness of her present position, Harris writes, "I am one among many women locked down in the jails, prisons and me tal hospitals for refusal to fit the mold of passive femininity."

Attorney Ruth Astle, who is now working with Leonard Weinglass in Emily's defense, is also a veteran of several political trials. Active in the defense of Gary Lawton and the San Quentin Six, Astle, who practices in San Francisco, was contacted by Weinglass and asked to join him. Astle agreed to take the controversial case, at financial hardship to herself (Harris has no money to pay her), because "I think Emily deserves the best defense possible, and that now means having a woman lawyer to defend her."

Referring to her client as "personally likable," Astle explained, "Women do represent women differently than a male (lawyer). . . there is a difference in perspective and work style."

Astle said she would also like to see the Left modify its "divisive and paranoid" reactions towards her client and "stand behind" her. The lawyer confirmed that politics will be an "important part" of the trial but they would be integrated into the total defense. "It will not be a circus." Asked if she was optimistic about the coming legal

(please turn to page 16)

MORE HARRIS:

(continued from page 7)

battle, the lawyer commented, "You have to live this kind of case one day at a time."

Astle referred to a possible challenge calling for the quashing of the Grand Jury indictments against Emily (and Bill) on the grounds that the grand jurors are not a body of her peers. Two similar challenges were made early this year in Los Angeles and San Joaquin Valley. The UFW defendants up north won their motion, and charges were dismissed. The Los Angeles attempt was also successful, but the motion here was overturned shortly afterwards by the California Appeals Court.

Astle further said her client's case offers many exciting legal challenges, and she and Weinglass will have ample opportunity to help Bill and Emily "show contradictions and attempt to make the legal system live up to its promises of *equal* rights and justice."

One inequality already besetting the defense is that of money. The lack of it might curtail needed extensive investigations and possibly some challenges they would like to make.

"We're trying to put together a Cadillac defense," says Astle "so far we just have a Volkswagon." Persons interested in helping to build a more equal political vehicle are asked to send contributions or other resources in care of Ruth Astle, 9 First St., San Francisco, Calif. 94105. Make checks payable to Harris Defense Fund. □

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